

GOLFDOM

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GOLF BUSINESS

BY HERB GRAFFIS

Teaching pros losing grasp on members: During the past two years, golfers have benefitted from expensive lesson series that have a few pupils spending a good part of four or five days with a competent professional.

Charges include room and meals at a first class rate, lesson fees, golf cars, playing lessons, practice balls and incidentals, usually at a resort facility.

These small groups are of men and women club members. There also are schools of this sort for the seniors and juniors. Everything is set up to accent learning and the pupil's share of the responsibility in the lessons is made plain.

The schooling is a great improvement on the monotonous, old style lesson pattern of a half hour hitting balls and listening to the pro tell you what to do.

A modern golf lesson today calls for learning what to do when the teacher isn't near. Golf, after many years of slow and small progress in its usual type of schooling, has seen the ordinary golfer do as the expert does and LEARN golf with a brief and clear period of basic training in understanding the fundamentals.

Then, what the golfer needs, instead of the same old thing repeated, is a check-up showing him how to correctly apply what he already knows.

Tommy Armour expressed the principle that is the basis of all effective golf instruction when a pupil asked him, "What did I do wrong?" Armour replied, "I don't know what of perhaps a dozen things you did wrong but I can tell you one thing you didn't do right."

Any competent experienced golf instructor can tell the pupil the one thing the pupil needs to work on in a lesson. That focus of learning and a

few minutes of supervised practice, so the pupil can work out his own answer that will stick with him, doesn't take the conventional half-hour. But the old half-hour pattern is there and no club or pro or golf resort has been able to progress from the lesson style established 70 years ago when there weren't enough pros to give playing lessons.

Two years ago, a GOLFDOM survey showed lesson revenue averaged about \$3,000 a year at 78 percent of the reporting clubs. You can be sure the clubs reporting were high grade.

There is reason to believe that \$7 per year per member is about what's spent on lessons by private club members. The clubs would be better off to raise the pro's salary \$7 per member per year and have him out on the lesson tee a good part of the time where his expert specialized knowledge would do the most members the most good.

Now at most private clubs, you see two or three members on the practice tee with the pro giving his attention to only one of them.

Obviously, a comprehensive teaching program can really help stimulate clubhouse and pro shop sales with added traffic. PGA Education Director Gary Wren and the NGF's Lorraine Abbott have worked hard to bring more effective teaching methods.

They both agree on the new theory that a pupil should receive basic training in learning. With that and planned expert supervision at intervals, students learn how to teach themselves.

Every effective golf instructor I've known during the 50 years I have been reporting golf business has said a useful lesson is 25 percent teaching and 75 percent learning. Yet the method of instruction for a long time has been on the former. □